

Franciscans Today

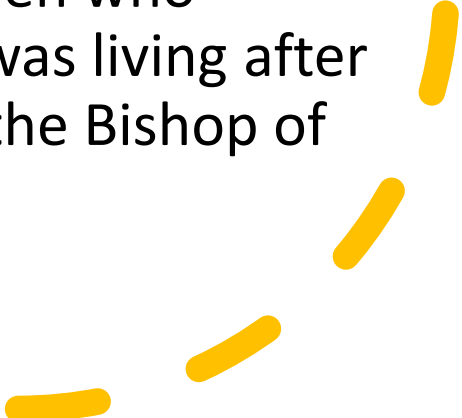
A Simple Structural Explanation of Members of the Family

By Sr. Lucy Slinger, FSPA

The **Franciscans** are a group of related mendicant (begging) Christian religious orders, primarily within the Catholic Church but with Anglican, Lutheran, and other Protestant members.

Founded in 1209 by Francis of Assisi, these orders include the Order of Friars Minor, the Order of Saint Clare, and the Third Order of Saint Francis

It all started with a small group of lay men who wanted to live the life Francis of Assisi was living after his renunciation of the “world” before the Bishop of Assisi.



Franciscan Family Members

Canonically
Designated

1st Order Friars Minor

Vowed men including
ordained and lay
“Friar” or “Brother”

1. Order Friar Minor (O.F.M.)
founded 1209 (1223 first Rule)
2. "Conventuals" O.F.M. Conv.
formed 1517
3. "Capuchins" O.F.M . Cap
formed 1520

2nd Order Poor Clares

Order of Saint Clare (1263)
“The Poor Ladies”, “nun”

Solemn Vows
Contemplative/ Cloistered
Ministry is Prayer

3rd Order

Brothers & Sisters of Penance
Founded 1221

Regular

Public traditional Vows
Live in Community
“Sister” or “Brother”
many use OSF or TOR

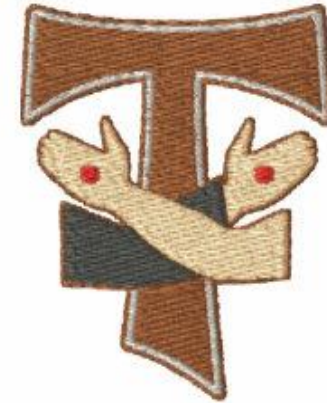
Secular

Public Promises by lay people and
diocesan priests and deacons
Everyday lives in the world
Founded 1212 “OFS”

There are Anglican/Episcopalian, Lutheran as
well as predominantly Catholic groups.

The Third Order is by far the largest of the Franciscan orders. It was created by St. Francis in 1221 because many married men and women, and diocesan clergy, were asking to embrace his style of life and could not enter either the First or Second order.

Within the Third Order of St. Francis, it is necessary to distinguish between the Third Order Regular and the Third Order Secular.



The coat of arms that is a universal symbol of Franciscans "contains the Tau cross, with two crossed arms: Christ's right hand with the nail wound and Francis' left hand with the stigmata wound." *This symbol is sometimes called "the conformity."*

Third Order Regular (TOR)

Eventually some lay people following Francis as tertiaries started living in communities. These groups developed into religious orders professing public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. They are now referred to as Third Order Regular (TOR). Members of these communities can be male or female, but they live in community according to their gender. This branch of the Franciscan Family was officially founded in 1447 by a papal decree uniting several groups. Today there are hundreds of Third Order Regular communities around the world.

Third Order Secular (OFS) (in Latin: Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis)

Known as the Secular Franciscans, includes devout persons, both men and women, as well as some diocesan priests and deacons. Members do not live in community but live their everyday lives in the world. Members do gather in community on a regular basis for prayer, service and other sharing. They profess public promises committing themselves to living the gospel according to the example of Francis. The process of becoming a Secular Franciscan involves a commitment of from 18 to 36 months of formation. There are nearly 13,000 Secular Franciscans in the United States today.

Other Franciscan Related Groups

- **Affiliates, Co-Journers Sojourners, Associates, Companions, Apprentices, etc.** are simply lay people who have chosen to make an official commitment to live the charism, mission and vision of a particular group of Third Order Regular Franciscans. These groups are not canonically recognized but do live the Franciscan charism of the congregations they profess to follow.
- **Franciscan-hearted people** living by Franciscan values based on personal choice.

Nonprofit Organizations

Franciscan Federation www.franfed.org

The Vision of this USA based organization is to deepen the understanding and love of the Third Order Regular Charism in order to share this gift with the Church and the World. (A List of key Franciscan related organizations and contacts are given on next slide)

The Executive Leaders of Franciscan Organizations (ELFO) as of 2022:

1. Franciscan Federation of Sisters and Brothers of the Third Order Regular*

Sara Marks, Executive Director
Fr. Frank Scornaienchi, TOR, President

2. Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities (AFCU)

Debi Haug, Executive Secretary

3. Franciscan Action Network (FAN)

Michele Dunne, OFS, Executive Director

4. Commission on Franciscan Intellectual Tradition (CFIT)

Darleen Pryds, Ph.D., Executive Committee of Board

5. Franciscan Mission Service (FMS)

Liz Hughes, Executive Director

6. Franciscans International (FI-NGO)

Kevin Queally, TOR, Vice President, Board
Marya Farah, NY Office of NGO at UN

7. Franciscan Media (FM)

Kelly McCracken, President

8. Franciscan Pilgrimage Program (FPP)

Fr. John Cella, OFM, President

Liaison Role:

9. Secular Franciscan Order* (OFS)

Layna Maher, OFS, Delegate

Jan Parker, OFS, National Minister

*The Franciscan Federation USA is the convening organization, and its board has oversight of the process and finances of the work.

Brief Historical Overview (adapted from Wikipedia)

The name of the original order, Ordo Fratrum Minorum (Friars Minor, literally 'Order of Lesser Brothers') stems from Francis of Assisi's rejection of wealth and social status. Francis was the son of a wealthy cloth merchant but gave up his wealth to pursue his faith more fully. He cut all ties that remained with his family and pursued a life living in solidarity with his fellow brothers in Christ.

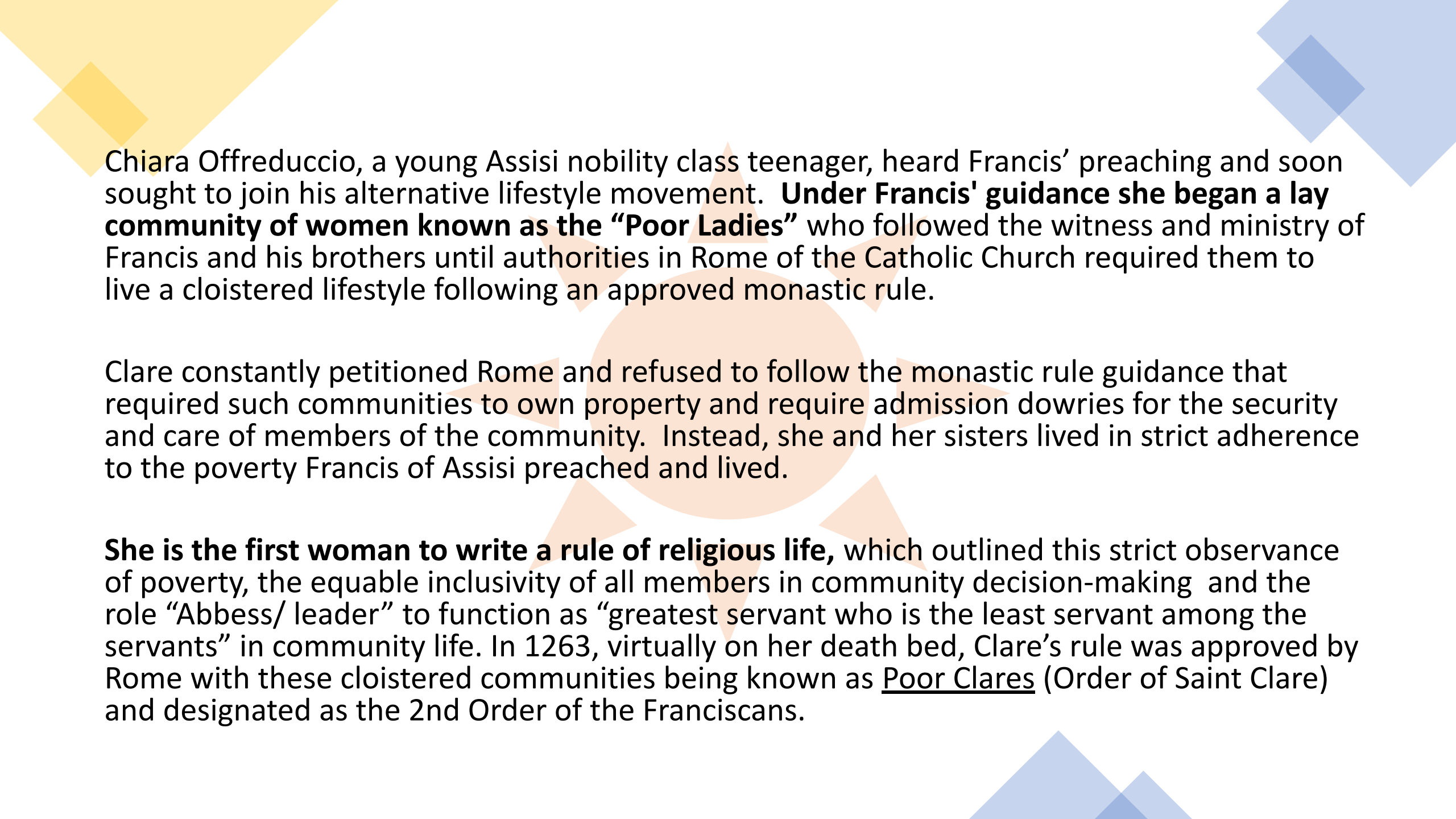
Francis adopted the simple tunic worn by peasants as the manner of dress/ religious habit to better identify with core values of **poverty** and **humility**. These early members begged or did manual labor for their food and lived in kinship with the marginalized in society. Those who joined him became the original Order of Friars Minor and were identified by habit, service to the marginalized, poor, and social and religious ostracized such as lepers. Eventually they also were invited to be itinerant preachers using the vernacular language of the common people to distinguish them from the Clerics of the time.



Francis began preaching around 1207 and traveled to Rome to seek approval from Pope Innocent III in 1209 to form a new religious order. The original Rule of Saint Francis approved by the Pope did not allow ownership of property, requiring members of the order to beg for food while preaching. The austerity was meant to emulate the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Franciscans traveled and preached in the streets, while staying in church properties.

The extreme poverty required of members by Francis was relaxed in the final revision of the Rule in 1223. The degree of observance required of members remained a major source of conflict within the First Order, resulting in numerous secessions. The Order of Friars Minor, previously known as the "Observant" branch, is one of the three Franciscan First Orders within the Catholic Church, the others being the "Conventuals" (formed 1517) and "Capuchins" (1520).

The Order of Friars Minor, in its current form, is the result of an amalgamation of several smaller orders completed in 1897 by Pope Leo XIII. The latter two, the Capuchin and Conventual, remain distinct religious institutes within the Catholic Church, observing the Rule of Saint Francis with different emphases. Conventual Franciscans are sometimes referred to as greyfriars because of their habit.



Chiara Offreduccio, a young Assisi nobility class teenager, heard Francis' preaching and soon sought to join his alternative lifestyle movement. **Under Francis' guidance she began a lay community of women known as the "Poor Ladies"** who followed the witness and ministry of Francis and his brothers until authorities in Rome of the Catholic Church required them to live a cloistered lifestyle following an approved monastic rule.

Clare constantly petitioned Rome and refused to follow the monastic rule guidance that required such communities to own property and require admission dowries for the security and care of members of the community. Instead, she and her sisters lived in strict adherence to the poverty Francis of Assisi preached and lived.

She is the first woman to write a rule of religious life, which outlined this strict observance of poverty, the equitable inclusivity of all members in community decision-making and the role "Abbess/ leader" to function as "greatest servant who is the least servant among the servants" in community life. In 1263, virtually on her death bed, Clare's rule was approved by Rome with these cloistered communities being known as Poor Clares (Order of Saint Clare) and designated as the 2nd Order of the Franciscans.

Conclusion: You are Wanted, Welcomed, and Needed

- All members of the Franciscan Family have a **common lay person origin** based on the way the humble Francis of Assisi—who never became a priest—chose to live.
- Differences in group charisms have developed into **highly similar yet subtly different** approved rules as a chosen way to live as Franciscans today.
- **Not all Franciscans are Roman Catholics.** There are ecumenical groups as well as Anglican, Lutheran and other denominations of the Franciscan family today around the world.
- Like all other baptized Christians, designated **religious or clerical men and women Franciscans strive to live the gospel** as follower of Jesus of Nazareth. Vow profession is a deepening of the baptismal and confirmational sacramental Christian commitment and call.
- The **vows or evangelical counsels** of poverty, chastity/consecrated celibacy and obedience **are professed as shared stands of living**, with intentional communal support for ongoing spiritual growth and development.
- **All are invited and welcomed** to freely make the choice to live the Franciscan charism: values and witness in service to the excluded, forgotten, abused, disrespected marginalized aspects of creation so apparent in today's world.